



COLORADO

Parks and Wildlife

Department of Natural Resources

Director's Office
6060 Broadway
Denver, CO 80216
P 303.297.1192

To: Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission
From: Dan Prenzlw, Director
Date: February 24, 2022
Re: Division recommendation to deny amended petition to classify bison as big game

In August 2021, Grasslands Unlimited (then called Colorado Prairie Initiative) petitioned the Parks and Wildlife Commission to amend its regulations to (a) classify only privately-owned bison and hybrids as “domestic animals” and (b) classify other bison as “big game.” The Division of Parks and Wildlife recommended denying the petition because it was unclear whether rulemaking was warranted, whether stakeholders supported the petition, and because other regulatory priorities took precedence over the petition. Staff suggested that the petitioner consult with stakeholders including the Colorado Department of Agriculture, the BLM, local landowners and the general public. In response to the Division’s recommendation, the petitioner withdrew the petition prior to the November Commission meeting. Grasslands Unlimited submitted an amended petition in January 2022 and the Division recommends denying it for similar reasons.

First, the amended petition still doesn’t demonstrate that rulemaking is warranted. The Division raised questions about how many bison have dispersed into Colorado, whether the number varies seasonally, and whether bison are affecting the landscape in a meaningful way. The amended petition makes no effort to answer these questions, and it remains unclear whether there’s a significant problem the agency should devote its limited resources to solving.

Second, as noted above, the Division urged Grasslands Unlimited to consult key stakeholders, including local landowners and the general public. Grasslands Unlimited does not appear to have conducted landowner or public outreach, and the stakeholders it did consult either have no position on the petition or (in the case of the Colorado Cattlemen’s Association) oppose it. So there appears to be no stakeholder support for the petition.

Third, the amended petition fails to address the Division’s concern that classifying bison as “big game” may trigger significant regulation and management responsibilities at a time when agency resources are stretched thin. For example, the Division may need to develop a bison management plan, formulate population objectives, and create and fund game damage prevention and compensation strategies. Finding resources to accomplish these tasks would be especially difficult while the Division and Commission remain occupied with regulatory and management priorities like developing a wolf restoration and management plan, launching the Keep Colorado Wild Pass, and exploring wolverine reintroduction. These and other priorities must take precedence over the amended petition.



Fourth, as the Cattlemen's Association points out, managing bison as wildlife may present risks to domestic cattle and livestock, including hybridization and disease transmission. The amended petition doesn't address these risks.

The Division is unclear whether the issue generating the petition was wild bison dispersing from Utah into Colorado or the desire to reintroduce bison to create a conservation herd(s) at a landscape scale.

The Division welcomes further discussion with Grasslands Unlimited about bison restoration and management, if that is its goal, and ultimately broadening the discussion to include a variety of stakeholders. But the Division cannot support the amended petition for the reasons listed above.